

# The College Writings

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The Whirling Dervishes  
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*The Whirling Dervishes*

(Oct. 1861, p 53) IX, 2.

There is hardly anything in Constantinople which the traveler is so pressingly urged to witness as the ceremonials connected with the worship of the whirling dervishes, improperly termed dancing dervishes, and hardly anything from which he comes away with a greater feeling of disappointment. And in fact, it might be made as a general statement in regard to the East, that for the most part, travelers are more disappointed than pleased with it. The reason is simply this. They have formed too high expectations. From their childhood they have been brought up to consider the East, as a synonym for all that is gorgeous and magnificent;—tales of the Arabian Nights float in their imagination,—they expect to see gold and silver as plentiful as brass and iron, and because they do not, they are ready to set down the whole East as humbug. Others again, view everything through rose-colored spectacles. Every sunset bathes the world "in a sea of glory,"—the scrub oak, the bramble and the nettle are in their view transformed into the elm, the bay and the laurel,—they encircle everything with a poetic glow, and add their mite to spreading popular delusion.

But to return to our theme. The building in which these singular ceremonies are conducted, is an octagon, of unpretending appearance at present day, but which formerly must have been quite handsome. Beneath the eaves, and running entirely around it, are tablets on which are inscribed suitable passages from the Koran, emblazoned in gilt and purple. The court-yard is frequented by such vast flocks of doves, that in the words of a modern traveler, "When they rise from the pavement on which they have been feeding, the echoes of the court are thrilled with a soft thunder, and the air is shaken by a storm, while the branches of the cypress trees waves around in the darkened space." In the court are the fanatical old dervishes accustomed to sit, and gazing upon the sparkling waters of the Marmora, the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn, whitened by the sails of every European craft, curse the day that suffers the infidel *giaour* to enter their holy city.

Removing our boots and putting on slippers, we pass into the hall, a portion of which is railed off for the use of the performers. Here may be seen representatives from every part of the Ottoman empire. Here a civilian in his flowing robes, his embroidered tunic and rich turban,—there a fierce Arnaout or Koord from the mountains, with his firtle stuck full of pistols and yatagan. Here a tall Circassian with his close fitting fur cap, turned up around the edges,—there a Persian with a hat (saving the color), looking like an inverted cone of loaf sugar. Here too, perchance, may be seen the English cockney with his inevitable eye-glass, or as in the present case, a down East Yankee, whittling a pine stick. One end of the apartment is appropriated to the women, and from behind the lattices and gauze veils flash forth bright eyes, making one long—Bless me! I'd like to ha' said it!—for the services to commence. Soon a side door opens and the dervishes, twelve or fifteen in number, enter, clad in loose robes flowing down to their feet, and wearing upon their heads the tall, conical felt hats that mark their distinctive order. Prostrating themselves before a niche in the wall looking towards Mecca, they remain for some moments absorbed in prayer. Rising, they thrice circle their superior, who stands in the centre, clad in robes of the most costly silk and fur, bowing as they pass in from to him, and then take their stations in a circle, with arms folded across the breast, head slightly inclined forward, and eyes uncertain and dreamy as though gazing into the future. Anon music commences from the gallery above. Some plaintive melody breathed forth from reed pipes, and accompanied by the low strumming of

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the earthen drum. Gradually a religious fervor seems to steal over them; one by one they commence slowly turning, till all are in motion. Swifter and swifter still do they spin around, each one revolving on his own axis, yet maintaining the same relative position, as he circles around the enclosure. With arms extended and head sunk upon the breast, they float past, while their long loose robes spreading out on all sides, give them the appearance of a revolving bell, or as has been aptly remarked "imparting to their figures a pyramidal outline of which their sharp hats form the apex."

Homer may chant the praises of a dance which he likens to the whirling of

"—a wheel in giddy circles tost

And, rapid as it runs, the single spokes are lost."

The modern bard may sing of the "wheel, whirl, circle and curl," the grace and ease of the ball room devotee, but where can you find anything to be compared with this. Here is the poetry of motion, the gliding step, which Homer ascribes to the immortals.

After some ten minutes of this giddy whirl, simultaneously all cease, and with folded arms remain for a short interval absorbed in prayer. The mystic dance is then renewed as before. The same thing is repeated three several times, when the ceremony is concluded. As their sheik or religious leader leaves the apartment, anxious mothers throng the doorway, and place their infants in his path, that treading upon them, any fell disease, or influences of the evil one may be exorcised. It is a fearful, and withal somewhat ludicrous sight, to see him stepping from body to body of his kicking victims with as much apparent unconcern, as though treading on so many paving stones. We have seen the little things with eyes almost starting from the head under the tremendous pressure, yet have never heard of any particular injury resulting.

*Saint Sophia*

(Nov. 1861, p 139) IX, 3.

More than twelve hundred years ago, the Emperor Justinian, standing beneath the lofty dome of St. Sophia, extended his hands and cried out "Glory be to God, who hath thought me worthy to accomplish so great a work. I have vanquished thee, O Solomon!" Yet to-day, after the lapse of centuries, that venerable pile still stands a glorious monument to the fame of the Roman Emperor, and still uprears its swelling domes from a base apparently as firm as in the days of its consecration. What vicissitudes has it not experienced! What changes has it not witnessed! Twice it has been destroyed by fire, and once by an earthquake. Almost within its very wall have rung the battle cry of the Persian, the Russian, the Latin crusader and the Saracen. Twice has it been pillaged; its chalices turned into drinking cups; its sacred objects of worship trampled under foot and defiled. At its altar knelt the perfidious Alexius, when trembling before the vengeance of the Latin invaders, and at its altar the last of the race of the Constantines received absolution, and then going forth, fell nobly fighting in his country's cause.

All that the resources of the empire could produce, were lavished in its erection. Beautiful marbles, jaspers and porphyries were blended together with most exquisite skill. Mosaic representations of Christ, the Holy Virgin and cherubims were depicted upon its walls. Gold, silver and the precious gems were used as freely as the baser metals. Perhaps nowhere else could there be found such a collection of venerable and interesting materials. There were eight porphyry columns from the Temple of the Sun; eight verde-antique pillars that had once adorned the Temple of Diana of Ephesus; there were also pillars from the Acropolis of Athens; from the Temples of Osiris and Isis in Egypt, of Apollo at Delos, and of Cybele at Cyzicus.

For over nine hundred years St. Sophia remained a Christian church, but it fell with the downfall of Byzantium. On the capture of that city by the Saracens, Mohammed I. riding into the church, clad in his martial armor, declared that it should henceforth be sacred to the worship of the Prophet, and the voice of the Muezzin calling out the hour for prayer, proclaimed to the world the overthrow of Christianity, and the establishment of Islamism on European shores. but it is of the mosque to-day, that we are treating, and not the cathedral of Justinian. We should look in vain for its former splendor. Its gold and silver ornaments have fallen a prey to the rapacity of the conquerors, while Turkish fanaticism has broken down the consecrated altar, and effaced so far as practicable, the pictures and representations of the Saints, yet there are still to be seen several cherubims, high up in the dome which as yet have escaped the hand of the destroyer, and not long since in some repairs which were being made, some old pictures were discovered built into the wall. These however, the holy priest ordered, should be instantly covered again and the opening closed up.

The form of the mosque is externally nearly square, being two hundred and sixty-nine feet in length and two hundred and forty-three feet in breadth, but is internally divided by fluted columns into the shape of a Greek cross. "Its dome composed of pumice stone and brick, and pierced with twenty-four windows, is one hundred and fifteen feet in diameter, and hangs at the height of a hundred and eighty feet above the pavement, the arches which support it resting upon four massive piles, flanked by four columns of

Egyptian granite." From the base of this central dome, rise two minor ones, and six semi-domes crowning the different angles of the edifice. In entering the building, the idea of vastness and vacuity so predominates, that it is several moments before the mind can recover sufficiently to observe the minor details, while the hush and solemnity of the place,—the reverent posture and low voices of the attendants, fill one with awe, as in the presence of something holy. Standing in the galleries above, and looking down from their vast height, the worshipers below seem like mere pigmies, and the voices of the priests chanting forth passages from the Koran, fall upon the ear like the distant hum of insects. The walls are hung with large shields, embalmed with gilded inscriptions and verses from the Koran. Beneath the dome in three vast circles, rising one above the other are suspended hundreds of small glass lamps. Interspersed with these are ostrich eggs and balls of gold and silver tissue, giving an indescribable brilliancy to the illumination when the mosque is lighted up. Before the Kebleh (that is towards Mecca) stand two gigantic candles from five to six feet in height, and eighteen inches in diameter at the base, which are only lighted on state occasions. The ascent to the galleries is by means of a winding passage way, paced with stones, up which the Bishop was accustomed to ride on a white mule, when he blessed the kneeling congregation. Surrounding the mosque is a large and cloistral court, around the sides of which run open arcades, covered by low domes with leaden roofs. Trees are scattered about the enclosure, while in the centre plays a fountain, in which the faithful may bathe, ere entering the sacred edifice. Scattered around under the shades of trees are grouped pilgrims from distant portions of the realm, or merchants disposing of amulets, relics and charms. From the corner of this enclosure rise the four needle shaped minarets of St. Sophia, each girded midway by a galley of fretted stone work, whence, at the appointed hours, the Muezzins ascending by a spiral staircase from within announce that the time for prayer has arrived. The Turks abhor the sound of bells a being a relic of Christianity and hence the belfry has given place to the minaret, and the chimes to the voice of the Muezzin. Connected with the edifice are the Mausoleums of different Sultans with their Sultanas and children,—colleges for the education of the priesthood and libraries.

In one portion of the building is shown a spot where according to the ancient legends, the wall opened at the capture of the city, and closed again over a wounded Christian knight, and it is now superstitiously believed that when the day of Islam draws nigh its close, the wall will re-open, and that wounded knight will again appear to lead on the Christian host against the Turks. The gilded crescent now illumines the dome of St. Sophia, but the day perhaps is not far distant when the cross will again assert its supremacy. The policy of the Russian Czars towards Constantinople has ever been that of the "*Carthago est delenda*" of Cato censor, and as a perpetual reminder to them, on one of the thoroughfares leading out from St. Petersburg there stands a guide post on which are inscribed these significant words, "This way to Constantinople."

**The Cemeteries of the East**

(Jan. 1862, p 183) IX, 4.

"The city of the dead far exceeds that of the living." Perhaps in no place is this so strikingly illustrated as at Constantinople. Cemeteries here and there and everywhere meet the view. In making the circuit of the city walls, far more than four miles you ride along between a vast burial place on the one hand and the crumbling fortifications on the other. Cross over to Scutari, and the sepulchral forest of the dead stretches away several miles in length and breadth. Pass through the suburbs of the city, and you come upon *Le petit and Le grand champ des rots*. Go where you will, at almost every step you are reminded of the mortality of man.

The Turkish cemeteries around Constantinople inspire one with but little of the gloom and sadness incident to those of Christian lands. Almost always chosen on some elevated site, with blue waters of the Bosphorus or the Marmora laving their base, the feelings awakened are aught else than that of a pleasing and dream pensiveness. Catholicism—nay, even Protestantism surround the idea of death with terror. "To its sepulchers it imports lugubrious and cadaverous aspects and forms combined to augment the sentiment of terror or repugnance already created, as completely as the antique urns with their gay bas reliefs and graceful genii sporting amid flowers suggest a contrary sentiment; or the Mussulman tombs enriched with blue and gold, and seeming beneath the shade of dark masses of foliage rather as kiosques [sic] devoted to eternal peace and repose, than the cold and damp abodes of mouldering corpses." But in the East, it has been remarked, death blends so familiarly with life that it loses its terror to a degree most incredible. During the Easter holidays and other festal occasions, the Levantines throng their graveyards, and spend the live long day in mirth and dance, or perchance seated upon some tombstone which they have converted into a rough draught board, they play games of checkers, unmindful of the sleeping dead from which but a few inches of mould and a thin slab of marble separate them. Here and there may be seen coffee houses, whither in the evening hours, after the burden and heat of the day, the fashionable world direct their steps to smoke their pipes and sip their coffee, and whence gay strains of music float forth, strangely out of keeping with the character of the place. Few methinks, in Christian lands, would have the courage to walk at night amid the sepulchers and monuments of a burial place, and still fewer methinks would choose it for their daily walk; yet at Constantinople the Grand champ des Morts is the favorite promenade of the thoughtless Levantine. The jeweled beauty and fastidious beau throng its walks, at hours when in the shimmering moonlight the white sepulchral columns assume ghost-like forms, and seem to range themselves in the shifting shadows like the risen spirits in the Rime of the Ancient Mariner.

The Jews plant no trees in their cemeteries. No leafy bowers invite the singing birds; no shady walks to attract the passer by. Nothing can be conceived of more cheerless and sad than one of their burial places,—a wide waste of marble slabs, varying in hue from the dark gray of the tombstone of the last century to the dazzling white of to-day. The Greeks and Armenians set out plane-trees and button-woods in their cemeteries, with here and there a willow. They have one curious custom of representing the profession of the dead by carving on the tombstone the symbol of his calling. Thus the carpenter may be known by his plane, the mason by his trowel, or the literary man by his pen and inkstand. The manner of death is also frequently portrayed, and on the monuments of those who have suffered the extreme penalty of law may be seen a figure of the criminal on his knees, holding his head in his

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hands, while the blood stress from the headless trunk. We remember one comical representation. It was that of a man who had committed suicide. The body was hanging by a rope; around it were numerous curious carvings designed to represent tears, but looking for all the world like tadpoles, while underneath was the inscription, "Let every passer by drop a tear."

The Turkish cemeteries are distinguished from all others by the presence of the cypress, and the peculiar form of their tombstones. From the stunted specimens in Northern Climes we can hardly form any idea of the majesty and beauty to which the cypress attains beneath a Southern sky. Its sombre drapery does not grow discolored beneath the burning rays of the sun, nor does it fade before the wintry blasts of the Euxine, but retaining its full depth of hue, seems almost black as it stands out in bold relief against the clear azure of the sky. With age its bark acquires a gray or silvery hue, while its roots, tortuous and bare, seem to grapple the earth as in the folds of some gigantic serpent. Beside each monument a cypress is planted, each tree standing as the representative of some human being reposing beneath its shade. Thus with the increasing number of the dead, in a soil rendered peculiarly rich with the decay of animal matter, the sepulchral frost rises, spreads, and grows with a marvelous rapidity. The old monuments consisted of a single column, surmounted by a globe resembling a human face and decorated with a carved turban, the form and folds of which indicated the rank of the deceased; but latterly the column has given place to the upright slab, richly gilded and adorned, and the turban to the colored fez. The graves of females are distinguished by a diamond shaped slab, ornamented with a branch of the lotus or a shoot of the vine. Where there is a family burial place, the tombstone of the husband is placed at the head, that of the wife at the foot, while between them lies a broad slab, hollowed out in the center into shallow basins, in which the friends of the deceased place seeds and water to attract the birds of heaven to come and sing above the graves of those they love. The Turks, ordinarily so slow and dignified in their movements, are alone hurried in their funeral rites. This arises from the superstitious belief that the deceased undergoes torments till returned to the dust whence it sprung. Very soon after death ensues, the corpse is hurried almost at racing speed to the confines of the cemetery, where, on large flat stones provided for some purpose, the necessary ablutions are performed, and a small coin is placed in the hand to pay its entrance within the gates of paradise. Removed thence to its last resting place, the Imam or priest questions it concerning the leading doctrines of the Koran, a few handfuls of dirt are thrown over it, the last prayer is said, and the dead are left in that

*"Dreamless repose! Pathetic solitude!  
Where the votive cypress, in its stillness weird,  
Faithfully guards their everlasting slumbers."*



**Mount Olympus**

(Mar. 1862, p 284) IX, 6.

"I looked yet farther and higher, and saw in the heavens a silvery cloud that stood fast and still against the morning breeze; and so it was as a sign and a testimony—almost as a call from the neglected gods, that I now saw and acknowledged the snowy crown of the Mysian Olympus."

Almost every one at some period or other of his life is seized with an insane desire to visit some celebrated mountain and risk his precious neck in its ascent. Thus had it been with me. Living for years within sight of Mt. Olympus, it had been my dream by day and night. At times my Peripatetic longings to climb its classic peaks, for my ideas were strangely confused respecting this mountain and that other one, the abode of gods, who

"—on the snowy top  
Of cold Olympus, ruled the middle air,  
Their highest Heav'n;"

would arise to such a pitch that it would be found necessary to compel me to work off my pedal enthusiasm over the knotty intricacies of some hickory logs kept for the purpose, the mere sight of which being always found amply sufficient to render me sober for the rest of the day.

But perhaps, indulgent reader, you are anxious for the start which you have sagaciously foreseen would inevitably ensue, and certain it is that my Pegasus has been impatiently pawing the ground for some time. Imagine us then, that is the Domine, the Herr Von Schaick and myself, as reclining on the deck of the beautiful little steamer, the Zenny Doonya or New World. It was yet early morn as we steamed out of the harbor of Stamboul, and the heart of the mighty city had hardly yet begun to throb with activity and life. Swift over the waves of the Propontis our light craft sped; here past the warning lighthouse; there by the Princes' Isles; anon rushing by the fisherman at his toil, whose morning song might aptly be translated by the Irish lyric commencing

"Away, away, o'er the feathery crest  
Of the beautiful blue are we;  
For our toil-lot lies on its boiling breast  
And our wealth's in the glorious sea,"

On, still on, past city and village and town. Nearer, still nearer we drew to our journey's end till at three in the afternoon we cast anchor in a beautiful little cove, so completely land-locked as to be scarce rippled by the fiercest gale. Here, disembarking, an operation attended with some difficulty, for there being no wharves we were first carried in boats as near as the shallows would permit and thence borne on the shoulders of the brawny boatmen to the shore, we procured horses and started over the eighteen miles of plain intervening between the sea-coast and Broosa lying at the foot of Olympus.

Passing over the incidents of this ride which was pleasantly diversified by numerous contests between the Domine and his horse, which manifested a playful desire of lying down in every stream we came to, we dashed into the streets of the city just as the sunset gun was fired, and making our way to a Khân or native inn took up our quarters for the night. In the

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court-yard below, were a throng of pilgrims who with earthen drum, tambourine and song, made night hideous with their discord, creating just the kind of din that Moore must have had in mind when he penned these lines:

"Such a breach of the peace as their singing, my dear,  
So bad too, you'd swear that the gods of both arts,  
Of Music and Physic had taken a frolic—  
For setting a loud fit of Asthma in parts,  
And composing a fine rumbling base to a colic!"

Completing our arrangements for the ascent next morning, we turned in for the night, but not to sleep, for what with the noise outside and the vermin inside, all sleep fled far from us. It seemed as though the fleas of all nations including the "wicked flea" were there. "It was a carnal self-seeking congregation wholly inattentive to the service going on and devoted to the one object of having our blood." From that fatal night we date our respect for the science of phlebotomy. We were in an ecstasy of scratch. We felt for that unhappy choir who sought

"To catch the flea—to catch the flea—to catch the fleeting hour."

Wearily passed the night, and right welcome were the sounds of the bells as about 3 o'clock our guides arrived with the horses. Never shall I forget the impressions of that morning's ride. The moon was still pouring a flood of light over the landscape, creating every variety of light and shade, and as we struggled up through the forests and over the crags, occasionally we would come to the verge of precipices and chasms of such awful depth, it seemed as if no ray of light could penetrate their abysses. The very place seemed haunted; huge boulders and masses of rock starting into view took upon themselves strange, ghost-like forms, and the very moaning of the wind among those ancient trees seemed to our excited imaginations to speak with living voice. Our thoughts instinctively turned to the past, and we almost expected to see some of the Banditti spring forth, who in the days of the Emperors erected their strong holds amid these forests, and descending into the plains spread terror and devastation in their path; anon as we listened to the mournful cries of the jackals and other nocturnal beasts of prey, echoing among the cliff, we thought of the wild boar of such unexampled ferocity and strength that King Cræsus was compelled to send a military force to destroy it. And yet again we mused upon the untimely fate of one of the greatest generals the world has seen, who after the destruction of Carthage, pursued and hunted from city to city by implacable Roman hate, found here a final resting place, and whose ashes in their quiet sepulchre were reposing many hundred feet below us.

About ten o'clock we reached the line of perpetual snow, and dismounting, stretched ourselves out on the grass for a few moments before attempting the last part of our journey. It was a pleasant little valley in which we were encamped. Through it rippled a limpid stream, fed by the melting snows of Olympus, whose cone rose directly from it to the height of several hundred feet. This little stream presented the most curious anomaly of a bright green carpet of grass on the one side of its banks, while its other was lined with heavy masses of snow and ice. Leaving here our horses, guides, and baggage, we resolutely set our faces upward and commenced the struggle. The first part of the way the snow was quite soft, continually letting us through, but gradually it hardened as we advanced, till the last hundred feet terminated in glare ice upon the sides of the cone which appeared of alarming

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steepness. Here was where the greatest address was required, for a single misstep or slip would have plunged us from the narrow ridge to which we were clinging, down hundreds of feet. But cautiously cutting our path in the ice, we finally succeeded in reaching the summit, where we shivered away a half hour or so. Not a rock or tree or projecting hummock of ice to shield us from the biting wind that seemed to pierce our very marrow. So absorbed were we in the magnificent panorama spread out before us, that I hardly remember a remark to have been made till we started downward. Directly before us lay the city of the gilded domes and thousand minarets plainly visible in that clear air, even at so great a distance. To the north stretched the Black Sea with its rock-bound coasts and many headlands; to the south lay the Ægean and Straits of Hellespont. The waters of the Marmora played at our feet, specked by many a gallant bark, and afar off might be discerned the windings of the Bosphorus, while to the east rolled away a seemingly endless succession of mountains and plains, finally blending and lost in the distant horizon.

Our descent occupied comparatively but a short time; our pace which was moderate enough at the outset was speedily accelerated, the velocity varying directly as the gravity and weight of the person concerned, till losing all command over ourselves, we shot down the mountain-side like a falling star. Ye gods! how we flew! fifteen feet at a bound, space was annihilated for the time being, and the air rushed us as in a whirlwind. The Herr Von Schaick and myself were exceedingly lucky, reaching the bottom at nearly the same moment and with scarce a tumble on the way. But the Domine, where was the Domine? Casting our eyes aloft we beheld a dark mass descending at a fearful rate, enveloped in snow and straw. As it approached nearer we discovered in the centre of this mass the thrice unhappy object of our search, going through a variety of unwonted and most impromptu gymnastic exercises. Turning head over heels, hand-springs forward and flip-flops backward, rolling, tumbling, sliding, bumping, thumping, lo! the conquering hero came, and buried himself in the soft snow at the bottom. Gone was his hat. Dishevelled his locks. His coat was ragged and torn, while the snow in his rapid descent had so worked and forced its way beneath his garments as to give him the appearance of a stuffed mummy and most effectually prevent him bending any portion of his body.

Picking out of the loose drifts, our scattered faculties, and other property, we recrossed the stream, bade adieu to Olympus and were soon wending our home through the rapidly thickening gloom.